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**Tourist Attraction? Or Reverence –  
The Royal New Zealand Air Force Museum.**  
A Case Study of the Tensions Between Intent and Presentation

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## **ABSTRACT**

The military museum has in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century undergone a transformation in Western societies. The military museum has become less concerned with remembrance and more concerned with education and analysis. In New Zealand the armed services operate three museums; the Army, Air Force and Navy Museums. The following article is a case study based upon an interview undertaken with the Director of the Royal New Zealand Air Force Museum. This case study highlights the tensions a military museum Director may encounter in undertaking their duties, and satisfying their diverse stakeholders. For the Director of the RNZAF museum, a conflict has arisen between the needs to offer critical analysis of historical actions (in an educative context); to provide a tourist destination (as a primary means of funding) and to ensure a site of remembrance for those affected by the events portrayed.

## INTRODUCTION

Heritage tourism has been defined by Walsh (2001) as being the economic gains from visitors to a place, building or activity that has relied on socio cultural aspects of location or event in order to appeal to a visitor's emotion of time or place. Moore, (1997 p. 135) defines such a location as "a geographical site which has a historical connection to carry the past into the present by virtue of its 'real' relationship to past events". Such a location therefore does not need to be a building. It could for example be a battlefield; archaeological sites long abandoned or indeed even a carnival. This article sets out to describe the way in which one site, catering to New Zealand heritage tourism – the museum of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, (Air Force Museum) attempts to bring the past into the present by presenting the events depicted within the museum as a 'real experience'. In particular the article is constructed around an interview undertaken with the Director of the Air Force museum which revealed both conscious and unconscious tensions within her role. The authors of this article have chosen to follow the definition of museum given by the international Council of Museums ICOM (2006) in that a museum is a "permanent institution in the service of society, and of its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits for purposes of study education and enjoyment, ...evidence of people and their environment." (<http://icom.museum/ethics.html>). Therein lies the seeds of the tensions which emerged from the interview and analysis.

The Air Force museum is dedicated to the history and activities of the Royal New Zealand Air Force. In this regard the museum can be considered a military museum. The definition given above, while not the only definition of a museum also conforms to a definition given by the Oxford English Dictionary, in that a museum is an institution in "which objects of historical scientific or cultural interest are preserved and exhibited". (<http://dictionary.oed.com>). In addition the Air Force museum could be said to be an historic site, as Moore (1997, p. 136) suggests, it is a "real place". It is also the focus of reverence and remembrance on the part of veterans and their families. The museum occupies the buildings and land previously utilised as a Royal New Zealand Air Force base at Wigram outside the city of Christchurch in New Zealand, where many young men underwent initial training prior to departing for War Service.

In order to highlight the tensions discovered, the article is structured in the following way. The Air Force museum depicts a 'soldiers' history, therefore immediately following this introduction is a context setting section which very briefly outlines the history of New Zealand Military exploits. Then follows a discussion regarding military tourism and in particular the three armed services museums in New Zealand, (service museums). After an outline of the service museums' holdings there is a brief discussion of community before describing the method that was utilised in analysing the interview. This is done to set this case in an appropriate context. Finally a case study critique of the Air Force museum has been constructed around the interview with the Director.

## **BACKGROUND**

Since colonisation, the citizens of New Zealand have contributed men and women to both 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century armed conflicts. These conflicts began within New Zealand when colonists, protected by the British military, began to displace the indigenous Maori population. A consequence of this activity was the introduction of firearms into the Maori arsenal. The introduction of muskets into the Maori arsenal resulted in the so called "musket wars" that were predominant during the period 1820-1840 (Crosby 2001, King 2003). While the musket wars were, on the whole an inter-tribal phenomenon, it did not last and appeared to end with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. The use of the musket by the Maori was to become well developed enabling some Maori to stand against the Crown during a protracted period of civil war in which Maori tribes supported Imperial troops in their endeavours to subdue rebellious tribes upset at the speed in which colonisation was taking place. That period of civil war ended with the decade 1860 and this time the collective action became known as the New Zealand Wars (Belich 1998; King, 2003, p. 185).

The next significant armed conflict that New Zealand became involved was the South African Wars of 1899 – 1902, in which volunteer New Zealand mounted units supported the British in their war against the independence effort of the South African Boers. From that time and during the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, New Zealand contributed military resources to every major confrontation in which the United Kingdom became involved. As a result, a significantly disproportionate number of the young men and women of the developing colony, and later the sovereign state of New Zealand lost their lives in foreign wars on foreign soil. The New Zealand Army Website lists the following statistics. In World

War One 1914 – 1918, 16, 697 New Zealanders were killed and 41, 317 wounded. The population of New Zealand at that time was estimated to be just over 1 million and it is estimated that close to 100, 000 men and women served overseas during this conflict. This is in contrast to the level of casualties suffered during World War Two in which it is estimated that there were 6839 New Zealanders killed and 16, 543 wounded (NZ Army 2006). Such was the loss suffered during World War One that the conflict remains New Zealand's largest loss of life suffered while participating in warfare.

A consequence of this large loss of life, and a response to contributions in other conflicts, can now be seen throughout New Zealand's cities towns and villages. In even the smallest town there are numerous examples of military remembrance. Often this is seen in the erection of a cenotaph near the centre of a small town, or provision of a specific place within a town graveyard, or the erection of a commemorative building within the boundaries of a large metropolitan region. The largest of these, in New Zealand at least, usually take the form of a memorial museum. For example in Auckland there is the Auckland War Memorial and Museum, the main museum building in Auckland. In Wellington, the buildings now occupied by Massey University, Wellington were originally the Wellington Memorial Museum. In Tairua, a small village on the Coromandel, there is a section of the small cemetery devoted to the "glorious dead" and in Northcote, a suburb of Auckland, beside a crossroad there is a monument to "those who have fallen". Military remembrance in New Zealand is firmly part of the built landscape. This is also illustrated by the establishment of separate national museums to represent each of the three military services of New Zealand.

### **THE SERVICE MUSEUMS IN NEW ZEALAND.**

In establishing museums the military services within New Zealand are participating in a number of arenas. Among them is tourism, the preservation of military culture and heritage and education with associated research. The Air Force museum is first and foremost a 'tool' of the RNZAF. The exhibits, by which we mean the individual displays within the museum, attempt to reflect the culture and heritage of the RNZAF and revere the memories of those involved. This has, as we shall report, placed tensions upon the Director to ensure that the exhibits reflect a story that agrees with the cultural self image of the major stakeholder, the RNZAF and provide an outlet for tourism while not denigrating the memories involved. This situation is not just particular to the Air Force museum but also affects the two other service

museums, that of the Royal New Zealand Navy, and the New Zealand Army. The Air Force Museum is however in a different category to the other two as at the time of writing the Air Force museum is the only one of the three service museums that employs a civilian Director – the other two Directors are serving Military officers. This is not unusual within the service museums in New Zealand, the Royal New Zealand Navy has also, in the past, employed a civilian museum Director. The service museums are also involved in education and providing space and resources to assist researchers in military history. In support of their educational focus, all three service museums employ a specialist educator who provides structured activities to primary and secondary schools. In addition all three service museums have at least one staff member assigned to meeting the needs of post secondary education through assisting researchers with access to the museums' specialist libraries, archives and photographic records. Other activities of the educator involve demonstrating the range of activity that occupies the daily life of a service person. It could be argued that the service museums also are involved in a subtle programme of recruitment. As we will later report, according to the Director of the Air Force museum, the service museums, and the Air Force museum in particular, are considered to be involved in the leisure industry and more importantly are part of the large New Zealand tourism sector. This is a sector that in 2006 was estimated to be a NZ \$17.5 Billion industry, contributing 9% of New Zealand GDP and employing 176,000 Full time equivalents or 9.8% of the total workforce ([www.tourismresearch.govt.nz](http://www.tourismresearch.govt.nz)).

The service museums belong in a sub group of heritage tourism, in which “the veneration of military death is linked to modern nationalistic impulses” (Gatewood and Cameron, 2004, p. 193). The Air Force museum is one such site. In the western world this particular aspect of heritage tourism has developed and grown since the Second World War and has enjoyed stronger support in the Northern Hemisphere than in the Southern Hemisphere. The reason this type of tourism has developed is itself many fold. One suggestion is that the visitors to these sites are motivated by feelings of nostalgia, motivated by a desire to experience, possibly a sanitised history without the physical pain or unpleasantness of immediate memory. This type of visitor is looking for an idealised past, or a reality that no longer exists (Goulding 1999). This desire was acknowledged by the Director, as contributing to tensions between the need for historical accuracy as to social consequences, and the need of survivors and descendants to sanitise their actions. There is also a need to present the exhibits in a manner which is entertaining, so as to encourage

growth in visitor numbers. Others suggest that the motivation for visiting this type of heritage site is to undergo a learning experience, or simply experience recreation (Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002). However, there does appear to be agreement that the motivation to visit and the attending experience gained from the visit is dependant upon both the visitors perceptions of the site taken in conjunction with the interpretation given to the displays and exhibits by the museum staff. (Goulding 1999; Gilmore and Rentschler 2002; Poria, Butler and Aiery 2004).

War monuments, and the associated heritage sites, which may include museums, are significant not only for the events which are remembered but also, by omission, those events that the citizen or society would rather collectively forget (Walsh 2001). This aspect of 'selective' exhibition or as termed by Walsh, 'collective amnesia' is one that all three of the service museums in New Zealand have in common. However within the service museums in New Zealand there is little space given to the 'opposing' side. For example within the Air Force museum there were only three exhibits that acknowledged there were opposing sides in action against the RNZAF. These exhibits were weapons belonging to both German and Japanese forces together with uniforms of the Japanese and German Air Force. Exhibits within the Air Force museum are careful to restrict attention to the social and technological aspects of the subject and completely ignore the less acceptable sides of warfare. There was little attempt to explain the conflict or to provide a critique from the 'other side'. Such omissions could be seen as collective amnesia and or unwillingness by the Museum management to detract from the remembrance and tourism aspects of the museum. The perception of these tensions is reinforced by the fact that both hard copy and web publicity makes the point that the museum is "one of New Zealand's premier tourist attractions" ([www.airforcemuseum.co.nz](http://www.airforcemuseum.co.nz)) and do not mention the remembrance aspect.

## **NEW ZEALAND HOLDINGS**

Most of the New Zealand memorabilia held within the service museums and relates to overseas conflicts. Within all three service museums these holdings are more inclined to be as a result of action in the European theatres of the Great War and WWII. Throughout this article the term exhibits refers to individual presentations. Be they posters, objects dioramas montages or a mixture of all three.



The holdings of the New Zealand service museums, in addition to extensive still and moving image material, also holds a limited amount of personal material, again often from overseas rather than internal conflicts. These collections include uniforms, medals and so on relating to the New Zealanders who served. All three service museums hold examples of armaments and equipment. Most of these collections however have been amassed from what was available, rather than from a systematic attempt to gather collections which would illustrate all the theatres of war, and the types of combat involved. Advertising material for these museums as a rule does not highlight objects which illuminate the effects the conflicts had on New Zealand society, either at the time of the conflicts or later. Instead they highlight the reverence, remembrance and tourism aspects of such holdings. See for example [www.navymuseum.mil.nz](http://www.navymuseum.mil.nz); [www.airforcemuseum.co.nz](http://www.airforcemuseum.co.nz); [www.armymuseum.co.nz](http://www.armymuseum.co.nz).

Within New Zealand's military museums there is an implicit function of providing a focus to reinforce recruiting efforts for the services, but there does not seem to be a conscious objective associated with heritage. There is instead the *appearance* of only being interested in historical exhibits. The military museums' promotional material in guide books and signage would suggest an emphasis on entertainment, and family activities when on holiday. For example the Royal New Zealand Air Force Museum is promoted as "*People, Planes, and Experiences*" and, more to the point, as indicated above, the Director views the museum as a place where families may wish to spend some time. The Air Force museum is actively promoted as "*One of New Zealand's premier visitor attractions*". As if to reinforce such a belief, individual exhibitions within the Air Force Museum are similarly promoted as "Sorties over Saltwater", "Wartime Family" and "From Treacle Tin to Maverick Missile". Such displays serve to suggest that the museum is catering for a known and knowing community, while at the same time also appealing to aspects of nostalgia. The interview with the Director revealed a strong personal belief that the societal, personal and economic impacts were significant, but were not "sexy" in attracting visitors.

To date, there have been few published academic studies concerning the approach New Zealand service museums have taken in regard to military heritage when linked to tourism, nor has there been an investigation into the dominant purposes of service museums within New Zealand. Through speaking with the Director of the Air Force museum and analysing the responses it is possible to explore how the museum relates to concepts such as reverence and mourning, curiosity and anger at the loss of life. As yet the three service

museums in New Zealand do not seem to be taking a broader, social history, view of the role which the various conflicts have played in shaping the nation or contributing to New Zealand's contemporary society and its values and mores.

They have taken instead an aspect of remembrance that has been reflected in the nature and character of all three of the service museums. In all three the emphasis has been on either commemoration of events, or preservation of technology associated with those events, without any great depth of scrutiny as to what lay behind the events, or what the after effects have been. This could reflect the need to provide entertainment before edification, prompted by the need to generate funding through "tourist" visitors. There are however, emergent signs that this may be changing. For example, newer exhibits at the Air Force museum in particular address the effects of armed conflict on the families, both concurrent with the conflict and today. As can be seen in the introduction to the exhibit *ordinary people* which opens with a display board upon which is printed

*"Ordinary People?*

*Many ordinary New Zealanders have served in the RNZAF or the Air Forces of other Commonwealth countries, especially in times of conflict. They come forward to do their duty, and then quietly resume their civilian lives afterwards. More often than not, these ordinary people did some special and amazing things.*

*This display looks at the service of eleven older New Zealanders from the perspective of a new generation. Particularly in the eyes of their grandchildren, these people are far from ordinary"* (Air Force museum Christchurch)

Although this display has contributions from the grandchildren of those who served, overall the main emphasis is still on commemoration and preservation with little attempt to provide a deeper critique or indeed offer an alternative viewpoint to conflict. Such an exhibit stands in contrast to an exhibit in the Army Museum in Honolulu (HI) in which space is devoted to protests against the Vietnam War. There is no mention of civil protest contained within the Air Force museum – despite a number of New Zealand conscientious objectors and large scale anti Viet Nam protests. Again contained within the exhibits of the Air Force museum is the implicit impression of collective amnesia, lest the feelings of nostalgia are overturned. At interview, the Director was very aware of all the implications of what is

exhibited, yet the exhibits tend towards a sanitised view. As will be demonstrated, one of the emotions the Director specifically wanted to encourage was nostalgia. However such an approach could be as a result of the influence museums community has had on the Director of the Air Force museum. She several times referred to the influence and tacit pressure to maintain a sanitised history she receives from the volunteer veterans who are regularly at the museum. This is understandable, in the light of the need for those veterans to come to whatever terms they can with the events in which they took part, and manage what are often painful or distasteful memories.

## **COMMUNITY**

Heritage tourism is important for many reasons. In the first instance heritage tourism enables communities and regions to identify and protect special sites. There is an aspect of collaboration and agreement on what is special about heritage sites and this enables sites to help communities develop common themes and images that can be portrayed to the community and used in its marketing. Thirdly, communities can interpret heritage sites for their own benefits and keep those sites as living cultural icons. Fourth, communities may examine military heritage to come (in some part) to an understanding of their present as influenced by their past. Lastly, and possibly most importantly for visitors, the heritage sites can provide for the community, and region, an authenticity and quality of experience not previously enjoyed by that place (Ayala, 2000; Moulin and Boniface, 2001). In the case of New Zealand service museums there is a wider ‘community’ to serve than the immediate geographical location. All three service museums serve a national community, the largest group consisting of ex service personnel and their families, existing service personnel and their families, victims of warfare – be they the ‘victors’ or the ‘vanquished’ – educationally motivated visitors and the merely interested, in either the technological or social aspects of the exhibits. There is also within the Air Force Museum’s exhibits a subtle element of jingoism. Although the Air Force museum attracts international visitors, service people, ex service people and their families, the Director stated on more than one occasion that the target market was the Christchurch domestic market, and more specifically the Christchurch family market, indicating where she saw the best sources of revenue.

This list is by no means exhaustive but illustrates the extent of community in regard to the service museums in New Zealand. This raises the question over exactly what is meant by

community. Where there is talk of community there is sometimes the assumption, as with Dickinson (1947) that community embraces all people living within a selected geographical boundary. However, Schragger (2001), writing in the *Michigan Law Review* and Haugh and Pardy writing in terms of isolated Scottish destinations, (1999) make the case that a community can be defined as a collection of individuals held together by common beliefs, not necessarily common location. Such is the case with the community served by the military museums in New Zealand. Their community is composed of those that have a shared understanding; firstly of the service then of the military as a whole. The very nature of this shared connection, the belief that community is a collection of like-minded individuals, is crucial to the argument for establishment of community. Schragger (2001) and Haugh and Pardy (1999) argue that, in practice, connections between communities are constructed so as to avoid external control and encourage a sense of community and exclusiveness. As will be illustrated in the discussion that is to follow, it is this strong identification with a “community” that has led the Director of the Air Force museum towards maintenance of a nostalgic museum and away from one that encourages critical enquiry. She is consciously involved with the veteran community, but in addition is influenced strongly by the wider tourism sector and through research contacts with the academic community.

As in the northern hemisphere, the focus of military heritage tourism in New Zealand seems to have commenced as reverence (Gough 2004). By this it is meant that the first visitors were former service people and family members keen to remember and honour comrades in arms. This includes families visiting not only museums but also built structures such as cemeteries, war camps, enemy and allied positions including sites that hold no built remnants to remember and revere the memory of family members who were involved in foreign warfare.

Other visitors to these sites, especially the New Zealand service museums, may not remember, or even know, exact details or the significance of what they are encountering (Carman 2003). In many cases the management of the museums will have interpreted the action and suggested the significance of the action for such visitors to consider. As Dewar (2000) notes, all tourism sites since the beginning of civilisation, have required guides to interpret, explain and illuminate the significance of what is being viewed and experienced. Following the argument proposed by Austin (2002) prior visitor emotions and emotional responses also contribute to the way in which the museum responds to the visitor market.

Therefore guided interpretation is likely to be a critical factor in determining the reaction and experience of visitors to the items being viewed or sites visited when combined with the visitor's individual perception of what they are experiencing. Further, Austin (2002), cautions of the possibility of the experience becoming commoditised, to the extent that individuals will have pre-conceived expectations of what their reactions should be, based on the reported experiences of others, or will take part in activities from a purely entertainment seeking motivation. It would seem that this caution particularly applies to the service museums in New Zealand. Visitors to such sites are expected to have at least some superficial understanding of their country's history and, arguably, have preconceptions based on fragments of information from schooling and popular media about the country's military history. This in turn may lend itself to adopting an entertainment, as opposed to seeking understanding, perspective, of which the Director must be cognisant if she is to attract visitors.

This concept becomes more pertinent when considering that more recently, the focus within military museums in the West has changed from one of veneration to that of critical examination and analysis (Carman 2003). This has led to a perception that military heritage is a fundamental part of the broader national heritage, and hence a source of current culture, values, and mores. For example, Carman also suggests that the battlegrounds of Europe have become a focus for determining an overall European identity. Similarly, Ben-Amos (2003) reports on the role of commemorating the sacrifice of Israeli soldiers in forming an Israeli national identity. It would appear that examining sacrifice in conflict is closely associated with national identity and values. It is this aspect of identity – the assumption that the New Zealand service museums are catering for a community that wishes to see itself remembered and venerated rather than critiqued, which (as we will note below), was brought out in the interview undertaken with the Director of the Air Force museum.

## **METHOD**

Outlined below are the methodology and procedures used to record and then interpret the responses given by the Director of the Air Force museum. The analytical method adopted is a critical discourse methodology derived from critical theory. In terms of data gathering, the process adopted, known as “grounded theory”, is based upon, but does not didactically follow, the concepts first suggested by Glaser and Strauss in *Discovery of Grounded Theory*

(1967). It is therefore an adapted grounded theory approach that follows the refinements suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990). These two authors expanded on the original grounded theory methodology in that they have refined the concept to include prior knowledge of the investigative field.

This approach fits well with the purposes this study, in that we are attempting to uncover or develop theory from data previously gathered. The purpose of critical discourse is to establish an interpretation of uncovered social facts. Discourse is related to narrative in that they are both, as Czarniawska (1999) has written, “a mode of association, of putting different things together” (p. 6-7). Incorporated into the critical analysis is the personal, professional and theoretical experience of the researcher (Strauss and Corbin, 1994; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Layder, 1994). By following the refinements suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990), we are able to allow for prior experience essential to the interpretation of the emergent data. In this case, one of the authors is a former Director of a military museum, and the other a retired military officer. This necessarily had an impact on how the results were interpreted. The adoption of the refinements to grounded methodology suggested by Strauss and Corbin grounds the theory not only in the emergent data, but also in relation to the world as interpreted by the researchers (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1994).

The data was gathered in two ways: firstly by conducting in person a semi-structured formal interview with the participant. The second part of the data collection involved viewing selected exhibits that were displayed within the museum one of which has already been mentioned. The interview was conducted at the museum and analysis was then undertaken based on a transcript of the interview.

The resulting discourse is constructed through our interaction with the Director’s statements, thus providing a vehicle for the application of an interpretive lens — an alternative interpretation which results in a vertical, rather than the more traditional horizontal, interpretation of the text (Monin and Monin, 2003). A vertical interpretation isolates particular words and thereby attempts to express thematic elements and gain an understanding of the subtext — a meaning which is plausible but which has not been expressly stated. The critical discourse method adopted aims, in essence, to convert the subtext to text, or make the implicit explicit. This in turn assists the reader in locating the

underlying premises that have helped shape and aid in the Director's reality (Carr, 2000, p. 209), and in understanding the social processes that the Director has utilised in constructing their world (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p. 492; Carr 2000, p 209).

The interview was subjected to a process which led to the construction of a case study of both the individual and organisation in which the Director worked.

In constructing the discourse, we offer the reader *one* view or interpretation of the social environment in which the Director operates. In keeping with narrative tradition, the reader is reminded that one of the important aspects of narrative and critical discourse analysis is personal invention based upon, and combined with, interpretation (Litvin, 2002, p. 163).

At first glance the remembrance motif within the Air Force museum is strong. This paper aims to critique this image of the museum and offer an insight into how the Director appears to approach both the holdings, and the exhibits contained within the museum. The information presented in the case study that follows is a synthesis of personal observation and interpretation of interviews conducted with the museum Director.

## **RESULTS: THE RNZAF MUSEUM AS A CASE STUDY**

The Museum is located in Christchurch, the principal port of entry for the South Island of New Zealand. Christchurch is one of the earliest European settlements in New Zealand and is referred to locally as the "Garden City" due to the predominance of flat formal gardens in the region. Christchurch is considered to be a relatively 'conservative' city by New Zealand standards. The Museum is a short bus ride or car drive out of the CBD.

The Air Force Museum: "*One of New Zealand's Premier Attractions*" was opened in 1987 on a disused RNZAF base, Wigram, near Christchurch in the South Island of New Zealand. The museum also operates a small adjunct to the main museum. This adjunct is in the North Island located within RNZAF OHEAKA, an operational military base. The main Air Force museum building is an impressive size, with a large entrance foyer and a main display hanger containing 28 aircraft. The entrance foyer is dominated by a Skyhawk fighter-bomber, originally designed as a carrier based aircraft that, for the RNZAF comprised the

ground based strike force. Further into the main display hanger there are aircraft such as; Canberra tactical bomber, a DC 3 (Dakota) transport , Iroquois helicopter, and Sopworth Camel World War 1 replica fighter, along with 23 other 'vintage' aircraft representing New Zealand's military aviation heritage. The museum also holds a research library, photographic and printed archives and a well developed oral history unit. In addition the museum also has a separate active restoration hanger where work is in progress restoring further airframes and relics.

At the time of the interview the incumbent Director of the Air Force museum was a civilian. The RNZAF museum, like the other two service museums in New Zealand, is funded through a combination of government and private funds. The Air Force provides the operational and capital funds for the museum and the employees of the museum are either serving or civilian employees of the New Zealand Defence Force. The internal allocations of the funds are distributed according to an annual plan that needs to be approved by the RNZAF Museum Trust Board, itself a mixture of military and civilian personnel. The Trust Board is the mechanism whereby the military can disassociate itself from the commercial aspects of the museum such as conference venue hire, and concessionaries. Once the annual plan is agreed, the Trust Board acts in the capacity of any other 'board of Directors' and oversees the work of the Director. The Director in turn has all the 'normal' responsibilities of a CEO.

This aspect, the apparent need to be separate from the military, is, as we shall see, an inconsistent attitude and one that is not fully supported by the Director. It is the military that appears to want separation. For example the web address for the museum is [www.airforcemuseum.co.nz](http://www.airforcemuseum.co.nz). Not as one may suspect [www.AirForcemuseum.mil.nz](http://www.AirForcemuseum.mil.nz). The use of a '.co' designator can be seen as an attempt to place distance between the military and the museum. Further instances of distance can be seen in the tag line of the museum "*One of New Zealand's Premier Visitor Attractions*" The immediate impression is that this is not a service museum; rather it is a visitor attraction, not a site of remembrance or reverence or indeed even a museum.

Again, through analysing the words of the Director it can be illustrated that there appears to be a tension between the need to be a memorial and a need to generate revenue through presenting as a visitor attraction. There was clear ambiguity in the Director's words



which illustrated the tension between being a tourist site and the desire to be closely associated with the RNZAF often using the words “our” and “we” in relation to the RNZAF and its history, impact and management. It is apparent from this that the Director associates closely with the Air Force, and sees her role as integrated into the Service whilst the Service does not see the situation in the same light.

Thus the Air Force Museum emerges as something of a contradiction. On one level there are the overt displays of remembrance and reverence. On another level is the stated intention to be a general tourist visitor attraction. This is made clear within the interview conducted with the Director of the Air Force museum. At various points the Director discusses the need to be a tourist operation. These instances are interspersed with comments regarding the need to remember those who fought and how important such instances are to the social consciousness of New Zealand. It is during these episodes that the Director appears to be an advocate for encouragement of nostalgia.

For example:

Interviewer: *Okay, What is your perception of the reason people come here?*

Director: *A lot of people come here because we are a visitor attraction, because we are seen as a good and interesting thing to do. .... People come here because they know they are going to learn something, um people often have prior motivations, they have family members who served or they are coming for a community event. But most of our visitors are just that, they are tourists, they are coming for a day out, they are coming for a family activity.*

It is clear that the museum Director is attempting to encourage education and at the same time wants the museum to be identified as a tourist attraction. However she also suggested that:

Director: *“The key things we get from a lot of people is they weren’t expecting to be moved and they weren’t expecting to get the wave of nostalgia they were getting, and that comes from teenagers as well.”*

Interviewer: *“So they get a personal emotive response?”*

Director: *“They do, they enjoy the visit, they like the visit, but they also have a personal response to what they are seeing and the way a lot of our exhibitions are*

*being put together now actually encourages that emotive response. They are talking about what it was like for a person. So for example in our Bomber Command display”*

The Bomber Command display in question utilises photographs, equipment, stories and a gun turret from a bomber. Visitors are encouraged to attempt to enter the turret through its somewhat torturous entry, and in other ways to gain insight into the experiences of the New Zealanders who fought in Bomber Command. There is no real attempt to critique the roles and outcomes of the bomber offensive, the exhibits provide experiences and sanitised insights.

The intention of the exhibits it would seem is to have the visitors form an emotional bond with the site (Poria et al 2004, p. 235). In addition, it would also appear that as far as the Director is concerned, she is encouraging this aspect. How the story is told can be used to illustrate how, for the Air Force museum at least, remembrance and reverence are placed above the need to critique.

By such a comment we do not mean that the Air Force Museum is neglecting an educational or indeed a social history component. The Air Force Museum has close links with the secondary school sector in Christchurch. They also have an association with the History department at Canterbury University in Christchurch. The Air Force museum is also seen by the Director as “a social history museum first, a military museum second and an aircraft museum third.” It is just that the exhibits and the way in which they are presented and spoken about tend towards a feeling of reverence and nostalgic remembrance of the military past, rather than a critical assessment of the events that constructed New Zealand’s airborne military history. For example in an exhibit from the “War time family” the following is found.



This display does not really provide commentary but instead appeals to an emotion of “making do” and is presented in a fun way. The actual hardship is glossed over. This fondness for sanitised history extends to the story of the RNZAF. The past is presented with a fondness of military exploits. For example when asked by the interviewer about how the museum captured and presented information from participants in military activity, she responded:

Director: *“Our most recent exhibition, which I’ll show you, that opens tomorrow, we’ve actually got grandchildren talking about why their grandparents [who took part in the wars] were so special”.*

This example which refers back to the previously outlined “Ordinary People” exhibit further illustrates the way in which the Air Force museum is presenting the story relating to one aspect of the country’s military past. Within the Director’s words there appears to be acceptance that people who took part in warfare were some how “special” and are now requiring respect. Even more, that such participation in warfare shaped the very nature of New Zealand society. There is little in the above statement that would point to critical

interpretation, but rather that an emotion of reverence and remembrance has been constructed around the participants of the wars. This is made clear when the Director is asked about the non military dimensions of the museum and how the museum fulfils the role of a social history museum.

Interviewer: *“To what extent is the museum a resource for understanding the societal nature of New Zealand and New Zealanders?”*

Director: *“Well I think the service museums are essential to that, because we are a central part of what it means to be a New Zealander. We have been particularly active in two major wars and we continue to provide support for other nations, it’s part of the national identity”*

Interviewer: *“Is there a non military dimension to the museum?”*

Director: *“No, not really, our subject is military aviation”*

With such statements the Director places the RNZAF museum firmly within the realms of remembrance. The Director has also raised the contentious issue that the emotions encouraged by the displays and exhibits within the Air Force museum, being a service museum, are a central part of the New Zealanders psyche. Within the words used by the Director a sense of conflict and confusion emerges regarding the museum and its approach to military history. On one level the confusion may stem from the lack of any clear research agenda that is driving the collection. For example, the interviewer asked the Director if there were any secondary functions to the museum, the response *“There is not much else apart from preserving and presenting, that’s all there is”*

Yet at times the Museum Director goes to great lengths to suggest that they are in fact an educational institution and that they are interested in critical assessments of the role that the RNZAF has played in the history of New Zealand. The following response to the interviewer’s question on historical analysis illustrates such a point and also highlights the elements of confusion that are apparent in the way the Air Force museum is attempting to tell the RNZAF story.

Director: “[i]t could be any aspect of the RNZAF, because we are concerned there is not enough historical analysis being done. There is lots of lightweight chronology and things but not enough historical analysis. There are lots that would interest a lot of people but...”

There is a feeling of frustration that although the holdings allow deep investigation, there seems to be a lack of traction to undertake such research. The museum even offers up to \$NZ10,000 each year for the purposes of historical research. Overall, however, the museum appears as a ‘traditional’ military museum which has concentrated on telling a heroic story based on acceptable depictions of the participants. The museum offers a nostalgic view of past conflict while at the same time also appearing to be conflicted in terms of presentation. The Air Force museum’s Director appears to have the same conflict. The Museum is at once a visitor attraction, a site of remembrance, a family day out and an educational institution.

## CONCLUSION

This article set out to examine the place of the RNZAF museum within both a tourist and museum environment. The Museum has been described by the Director as both a social history museum and a military museum. In addition the Director has described the museum as a site of remembrance and as an institution that encourages critical examination of the role that the RNZAF has played in the history of New Zealand. In concluding this article we wish to highlight the various conflicts that have emerged as a result of the interview conducted with the Director of the Air Force museum.

The first conflict is in relation to tourism. Throughout the Western world heritage, and more specifically military tourism has increased in popularity (Goulding, 1999; Goulding 2000; Rigby, 2000; Poria et al, 2003; Gatewood and Cameron, 2004). The management of the Air Force museum have noticed such an increase and have attempted to market the Museum to visitors as one of New Zealand’s premier attractions. In support of this the Director told us that “a lot of people come here because we are a visitor attraction”. However the reasons for attending were not articulated. International experience has suggested that in the past visitors to heritage sites, of which the Air Force museum is one, are motivated by emotion rather than a quest for critical enlightenment (Poria et al p. 244). Once

at the site, the responsibility for interpretation rests with how the story is told. In the case of the Air Force museum, the story that is told is, by the Director's admission, one that encourages feelings of nostalgia. The encouragement of such an emotion may not convey a critical response for, as Goulding (2000) notes, the modern museum is increasingly seen as an enabler of past events rather than a preserver of the past. Preservation of the past is one of the key activities that the Director saw as being important to the Museum. In addition the Director noted that the exhibitions were intentionally designed to evoke such a response. The danger in approaching the displays in such a way is that the Museum may, by omission of events and artefacts that assist in critical assessment, deny the viewer the ability to form their own impression of the events portrayed (Walsh, 2001). The visitor may have approached the museum expecting enlightenment, and has found in the Air Force Museum, reinforcement of wartime remembrance.

The second, and perhaps more profound conflict, lies in the tensions between what the Director said, and the actual exhibits presented. The museum Director told us she wanted to present a museum that encouraged education, was critical in terms of history and had an objective story to tell. However the reality was somewhat different. An explanation could lie in the way in which the museum is managed and controlled. The Museum Director presented herself as the person who decided the fate of the museum, when in reality that fate was decided by The Museum Trust Board. The exhibits on the whole reflected a World War II emphasis and appeared to present displays that were both sympathetic to veterans and offered a showcase for the RNZAF. There is a normative impression gained when viewing the exhibits that the museum reflects the RNZAF as it *should* be seen rather than as it was or is. There is little in the way of critical analysis of history. Far from being a social history museum the Air Force museum is a military museum that presents the Air Force as a military unit dedicated to combat in an environment designed to reinforce emotions of remembrance and nostalgia. It would appear that for the Royal New Zealand Air Force at least, the modern museum is about remembrance, reverence, and construction of a nostalgic past.

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# Tourist attraction? Or reverence – The Royal New Zealand Air Force Museum. A case study of the tensions between intent and presentation

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